

Strategic Arts Messaging

2026 Edition

Successful arts advocates are always looking for ways to enhance the impact of their case-making by using the most persuasive policy arguments. This entails adapting our messages to address emerging opportunities, respond to the interests of policy leaders or cultivate support among newly elected public officials.

The talking points offered in this edition of The Practical Advocate have been tested using rigorous research methods and are attuned to the policy environment of 2026. While impactful advocacy is important every year, state advocates will need to surmount some extra hurdles today. State budgets are tightening due to federal funding uncertainty. Lawmakers' attention will be focused on elections: 36 states will elect governors and 6,122 state legislative seats are up for grabs in 2026. And political divides make passage of almost all legislation—even on consensus issues like the arts—more difficult.

Use the six messages outlined below to strategically bolster arts support in today's complex political climate.

1. The arts make America stronger.

American families and communities are fortified by the educational, civic, health and economic effects of the arts. We can show pride in our nation's creativity, which drives innovation and helps people and places to thrive.

2. The arts support healing for veterans and members of the military.

America's armed forces—and their family members—deserve our best support. That includes the arts. Members of the military are exposed to unique risks and injuries in



Sounds of Acoustic Recovery program, Warrior Transition Battalion, Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

conjunction with their service. Creative therapies have been [clinically proven](#) to help veterans recover from post-traumatic stress, brain injuries and other battle wounds. Arts experiences also contribute to positive mental health, social connections, [community engagement](#), and successful reintegration into family and civic life after deployment.

3. The arts celebrate America.

The arts help communities to preserve their cherished cultural heritage and tell the story of our democracy. This message has extra currency today because 2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Celebrating this milestone is a [federal priority](#), and many cultural organizations are playing a leading role in local and state [America 250](#) events.



Tuscarawas County's *Shine On Ohio, Shine On*, by muralist Sarah Dugger. Photo courtesy of the Ohio Arts Council

4. The arts facilitate good health.

The arts are increasingly used in clinical settings to promote positive physical and mental health outcomes. [Research](#) indicates that the arts can facilitate patient healing, reduce dependency on pain medications and mitigate stress for caregiving teams. Arts participation also promotes positive mental health, promotes healthy behaviors and fosters community connections that lead to wellbeing.

5. The arts are beneficial for older adults.

Arts participation and ongoing arts learning and skill development improve the mental and physical condition of older adults. [Abundant evidence](#) shows that the arts reduce isolation, support good health, strengthen social bonds, and bring a heightened sense of purpose and joy to our lives as we mature.

6. Students who engage in the arts do better in school and in life.

Students who study the arts have [better attendance](#), [lower dropout rates](#), and [higher scores](#) on reading and mathematics standardized tests. The arts also teach perseverance, communication and collaboration, giving students a leg up in [workforce preparation](#) and preparing our youth to become productive employees.

Return on Investment

Talking about the arts in terms that resonate with policy makers is the first part of an advocate's task. Then those messages should be accompanied by information showing how public dollars provide a strong return on investment. In order to justify government spending on the arts, lawmakers must be able to show that taxpayers' dollars are being deployed in ways that generate a net gain. Advocates can address this by providing information about, for instance:

- **Communities served by state arts funds within each legislative district or county:** Emphasize that public dollars ensure that all communities—including rural regions and low-income areas—have access to the advantages that the arts offer.
- **Matching funds leveraged:** For every \$1 in state arts funds awarded, how much local and private match do grantees secure? Lawmakers find these ratios compelling. Your state arts agency can likely calculate this figure based on grant data.
- **Learning outcomes:** Cite local or national studies showing improved attitudes toward learning, academic performance or attendance for students engaged in the arts.
- **Indicators of well-being or social engagement:** If such information is available from participants in local arts in health or creative aging programs, share them as examples of program impact.
- **Economic data:** This might include jobs generated or tax revenues returned by the arts sector.
- **Tourism data:** Elected officials are often interested in information about out-of-state visitors or arts attendee spending. Mine any relevant data your state tourism office collects, or use [Arts and Economic Prosperity](#) information.

It also can be useful to quantify how the **demand** for arts funding (from grant applications and funds requested from the state) exceeds the supply of available funds. This reinforces that communities want to see public investments and that new dollars will be put to good use.

A Note on Economic Impact

Why don't these talking points more forcefully assert the economic impact of the arts? While policy makers certainly require economic justifications for public investments, NASAA research indicates that economic arguments, alone, rarely convince skeptics that government should allocate funds for the arts. When using economic rationale:

- Emphasize that the arts sector generates revenues for other sectors, including merchants on Main Street and the hospitality industry.
- Where possible, provide specific state, county or district data—not just national statistics.
- Pair economic arguments with other messages about the positive community impact of public funding for the arts.

Additional Messaging Tips

Customize these messages. Tailor them to your intended audience and illustrate how the arts connect to the current goals of policy leaders in your state.

Don't "lead with need." Emphasize what the arts offer, not what our sector lacks.

Recruit multiple spokespeople. The best messengers sometimes come from outside the arts sector. Equip business owners, mayors, civic leaders and other champions to express their support for the arts.

Include local stories that bring the data to life. Stories make information more memorable and help policy makers understand how public arts investments make a tangible difference in the lives of individuals, families and communities.

Further Information

NASAA offers many free advocacy tools that can help you make your case for the arts at the state level. Explore these resources for more model messages and relevant facts.



Arts education programs like this one in rural Williston, South Carolina, help kids to flourish in and out of school. Photo courtesy of South Carolina Arts Commission

[The Arts and America's Bottom Line](#)

[Better Together: Public + Private Arts Funding](#)

[Arts and Creativity Strengthen our Nation: A Narrative and Message Guide](#)

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

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